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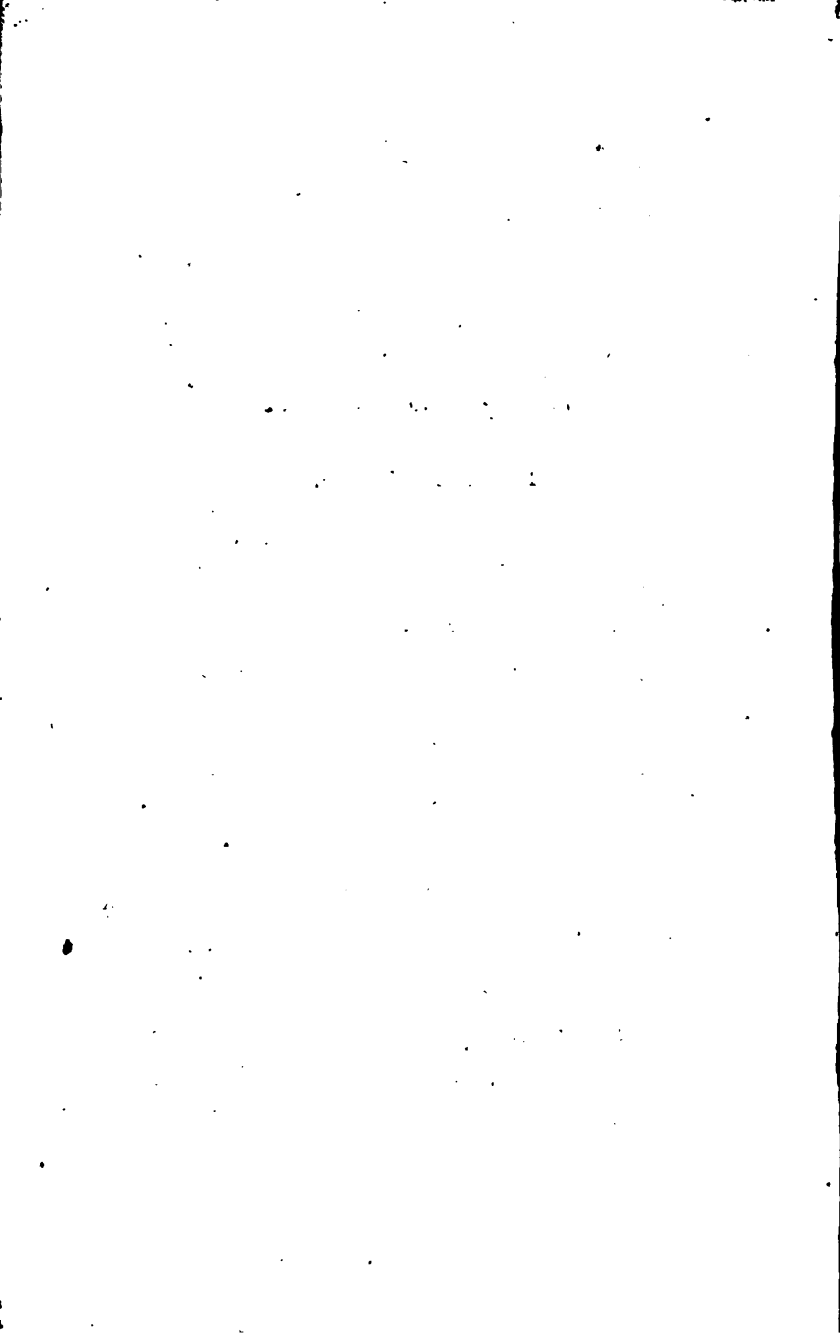




A N  
E N Q U I R Y  
I N T O T H E  
P R E S E N T S T A T E  
O F  
P O L I T E L E A R N I N G.

Εμοι προς φιλοσόφους εσι φιλια· προς μεν τοι σοφιστας  
η γραμματιστας· ετε νυν εσι φιλια μητε υπερον  
ποτε γενοιτο.

Tolerabile si Ædificia nostra diruerent Ædifi-  
candi capaces.



A N  
E N Q U I R Y  
I N T O . T H E  
P R E S E N T S T A T E  
O F  
P O L I T E L E A R N I N G  
I N  
E U R O P E .

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By OLIVER GOLDSMITH, M.B.

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THE SECOND EDITION  
Revised and Corrected.

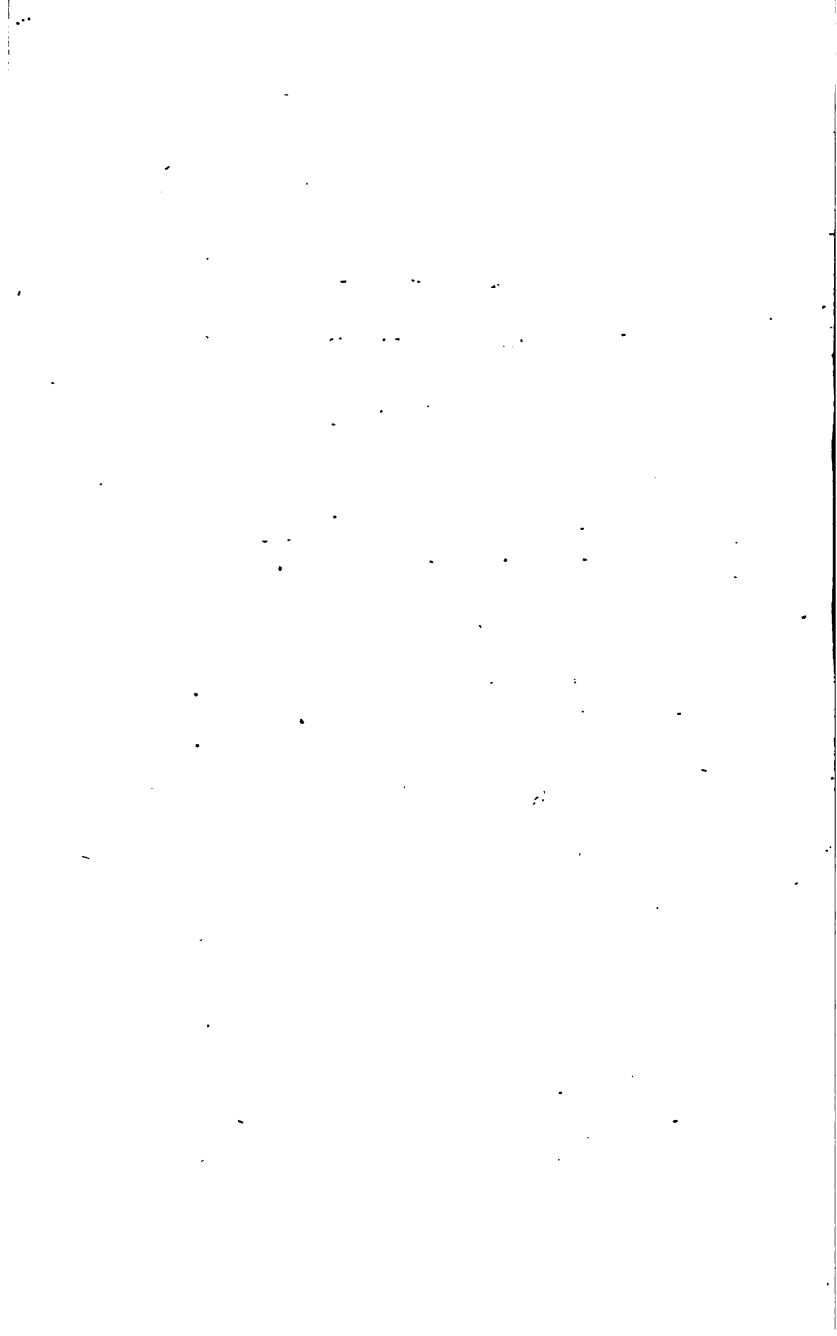
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AN

AN  
ENQUIRY  
INTO THE  
PRESENT STATE  
OF  
POLITE LEARNING.

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CHAP. I.  
INTRODUCTION.

**I**T has been so long the practice to represent literature as declining, that every renewal of this complaint now comes with diminish'd influence. The public has been so often excited by a false alarm, that at present the nearer we approach the threatened period of decay, the more our security increases.

B

To

## 2 THE PRESENT STATE

It will now probably be said that taking the decay of genius for granted, as I do, argues either resentment or partiality. The writer, possessed of fame, it may be asserted, is willing to enjoy it without a rival, by lessening every competitor ; or, if unsuccessful, he is desirous to turn upon others the contempt which is levelled at himself, and being convicted at the bar of literary justice, hopes for pardon by accusing every brother of the same profession.

SENSIBLE of this, I am at a loss where to find an apology for persisting to arraign the merit of the age ; for joining in a cry which the judicious have long since left to be kept up by the vulgar, and for adopting the sentiments of the multitude in a performance that at best can please only a few.

COMPLAINTS

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 3

COMPLAINTS of our degeneracy in literature as well as in morals, I own, have been frequently exhibited of late; but seem to be enforced more with the ardour of devious declamation, than the calmness of deliberate enquiry. The dullest critic, who strives at a reputation for delicacy, by shewing he cannot be pleased, may pathetically assure us that our taste is upon the decline, may consign every modern performance to oblivion, and bequeath nothing to posterity except the labours of our ancestors, or his own. Such general invective, however, conveys no instruction; all it teaches is, that the writer dislikes an age by which he is probably disregarded. The manner of being useful on the subject would be to point out the symptoms, to investigate the causes, and direct to the remedies of the approaching decay. This is a subject hi-



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therto unattempted in criticism, perhaps it is the only subject in which criticism can be useful.

How far the writer is equal to such an undertaking the reader must determine; yet, perhaps, his observations may be just, though his manner of expressing them should only serve as an example of the errors he undertakes to reprove.

NOVELTY, however, is not permitted to usurp the place of reason; it may attend, but shall not conduct the enquiry. But it should be observed that the more original any performance is, the more it is liable to deviate; for cautious stupidity is always in the right.

C H A P.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 5

### C H A P. II.

*The Causes which contribute to the decline of learning.*

**I**F we consider the revolutions which have happened in the common-wealth of letters, survey the rapid progress of learning in one period of antiquity, or its amazing decline in another, we shall be almost induced to accuse nature of partiality, as if she had exhausted all her efforts in adorning one age, while she left the succeeding entirely neglected. It is not to nature, however, but to ourselves alone that this partiality must be ascribed; the seeds of excellence are sown in every age, and it is wholly owing to a wrong direction in the passions or pursuits of mankind that they have not received the proper cultivation.

## 6 THE PRESENT STATE

As in the best regulated societies, the very laws which at first give the government solidity, may in the end contribute to its dissolution, so the efforts, which might have promoted learning in its feeble commencement, may, if continued, retard its progress. The paths of science, which were at first intricate because untrodden, may at last grow toilsome because too much frequented. As learning advances, the candidates for its honors become more numerous, and the acquisition of fame more uncertain; the modest may despair of attaining it, and the opulent think it too precarious to pursue; thus the task of supporting the honour of the times may at last devolve on indigence and effrontery, while learning must partake of the contempt of its professors.

To

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 7

To illustrate these assertions it may be proper to take a slight review of the decline of ancient learning; to consider how far its depravation was owing to the impossibility of supporting continued perfection; in what respects it proceeded from voluntary corruption; and how far it was hastened on by accident. If Modern learning be compared with Ancient in these different lights, a parallel between both, which has hitherto produced only vain dispute, may contribute to amusement, perhaps instruction. We shall thus be enabled to perceive what period of antiquity the present age most resembles, whether we are making advances towards excellence, or retiring again to primeval obscurity; we shall thus be taught to acquiesce in those defects which it is impossible to prevent; and reject all faulty

## 8 THE PRESENT STATE

innovations, though offered under the specious titles of improvement.

LEARNING, when planted in any country, is transient and fading, nor does it flourish till slow gradations of improvement have naturalized it to the soil. It makes feeble advances, begins among the vulgar, and rises into reputation among the great. It cannot be established in a state at once, by introducing the learned of other countries; these may grace a court, but seldom enlighten a kingdom. Ptolemy Philadelphus, Constantine Porphyrogeneta, Alfred, or Charlemagne, might have invited learned foreigners into their dominions, but could not establish learning. While in the radiance of royal favour, every art and science seemed to flourish; but when that was withdrawn, they

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 9

they quickly felt the rigours of a strange climate, and with exotic constitutions perished by neglect.

As the arts and sciences are slow in coming to maturity, it is requisite, in order to their perfection, that the state should be permanent, which gives them reception. There are numberless attempts without success, and experiments without conclusion, between the first rudiments of an art, and its utmost perfection; between the outlines of a shadow, and the picture of an Apelles. Leisure is required to go through the tedious interval, to join the experience of predecessors to our own, or enlarge our views, by building on the ruined attempts of former adventurers. All this may be performed in a society of long continuance; but if the kingdom be but of short duration,

## 10 THE PRESENT STATE

tion, as was the case of Arabia, learning seems coeval, sympathizes with its political struggles, and is annihilated in its dissolution.

BUT permanence in a state, is not alone sufficient; it is requisite also for this end that it should be free. Naturalists assure us, that all animals are sagacious in proportion as they are removed from the tyranny of others; in native liberty, the elephant is a citizen, and the beaver, an architect; but whenever the tyrant man intrudes upon their community, their spirit is broken, they seem anxious only for safety, and their intellects suffer an equal diminution with their prosperity. The parallel will hold with regard to mankind; fear naturally represses invention; benevolence, ambition; for in a nation of slaves, as in the

## OF POLITE LEARNING. II

the despotic governments of the east, to labour after fame is to be a candidate for danger.

To attain literary excellence also, it is requisite, that the soil and climate should, as much as possible, conduce to happiness. The earth must supply man with the necessities of life, before he has leisure, or inclination, to pursue more refined enjoyments. The climate also must be equally indulgent, for, in too warm a region, the mind is relaxed into languors, and by the opposite excess, is chilled into torpid inactivity.

THESE are the principal advantages which tend to the improvement of learning, and all these were united in the states of Greece and Rome.

W<sub>R</sub>



## 12 THE PRESENT STATE

We must now examine what hastens, or prevents its decline.

THOSE who behold the phænomena of nature, and content themselves with the view without enquiring into their causes, are perhaps wiser than is generally imagined. In this manner our rude ancestors were acquainted with facts; and Poetry, which helped the imagination and the memory, was thought the most proper vehicle for conveying their knowledge to posterity. It was the poet, who harmonized the ungrateful accents of his native dialect, who lifted it above common conversation, and shaped its rude combinations into order. From him the orator formed a stile, and though poetry first rose out of prose, in turn it gave birth to every prosaic excellence. Musical period, concise expression,  
and

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 13

and delicacy of sentiment, were all excellencies derived from the poet ; in short, he not only preceded, but formed the orator, philosopher, and historian.

WHEN the observations of past ages were collected, Philosophy next began to examine their causes. She had numberless facts from which to draw proper inferences, and poetry had taught her the strongest expression to enforce them. Thus the Greek philosophers, for instance, exerted all their happy talents in the investigation of truth, and the production of beauty. They saw, that there was more excellence in captivating the judgment, than in raising a momentary astonishment : in their arts they imitated only such parts of nature, as might please in the representation ; in the sciences, they cultivated such parts of knowledge, as  
it

## 14 THE PRESENT STATE

it was every man's duty to know. Thus learning was encouraged, protected, honoured, and, in its turn, it adorned, strengthened, and harmonized the community.

BUT as the mind is vigorous and active, and experiment is dilatory and painful, the spirit of philosophy being excited, the reasoner, when destitute of experiment, had recourse to theory, and gave up what was useful for refinement.

CRITICS, sophists, grammarians, rhetoricians, and commentators, now began to figure in the literary commonwealth. In the dawn of science, such are generally modest, and not entirely useless; their performances serve to mark the progress of learning, though they seldom contribute to its improvement. But as nothing but speculation

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 15

culation was required in making proficients, in their respective departments; so neither the satire, nor the contempt of the wise, tho' Socrates was of the number, nor the laws levelled at them by the state, though Cato was in the legislature, could prevent their approaches. Possessed of all the advantages of unfeeling dullness, laborious, insensible, and persevering, they still proceeded mending, and mending every work of genius, or, to speak without irony, undermining all that was polite and useful. Libraries were loaded, but not enriched with their labours, while the fatigues of reading their explanatory comments was tenfold that which might suffice for understanding the original, and their works effectually encreased our application, by professing to remove it.

AGAINST

## 16 THE PRESENT STATE

AGAINST so obstinate and irrefragable an enemy, what could avail the unsupported fallies of genius, or the opposition of transitory resentment? In short, they conquered by persevering, claimed the right of dictating upon every work of taste, sentiment, or genius, and at last, when destitute of other employment, like the supernumerary domestics of the great, made work for each other.

THEY now took upon them to teach poetry, to those who wanted genius; and the power of disputing, to those who knew nothing of the subject in debate. It was observed, how some of the most admired poets had copied nature. From these, they collected dry rules, dignified with long names, and such were obtruded upon the publick for their improvement. Common  
sense

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 17

sense would be apt to suggest, that the art might be studied to more advantage, rather by imitation than precept. It might suggest, that those rules were collected, not from nature, but a copy of nature, and would consequently give us still fainter resemblances of original beauty. It might still suggest, that explained wit makes but a feeble impression, that the observations of others, are soon forgotten, those, made by ourselves, are permanent and useful. But, it seems, understandings of every size were to be mechanically instructed in poetry. If the reader was too dull to relish the beauties of Virgil, the comment of Servius was ready to brighten his imagination ; if Terence could not raise him to a smile, Evantius was at hand, with a long-winded scholium to encrease his titillation. Such rules are calculated to make

C

block-

## 18 THE PRESENT STATE

blockheads talk, but all the lemmata of the Lyceum are unable to give him feeling.

BUT it would be endless to recount all the absurdities, which were hatched in the schools of those specious idlers; be it sufficient to say, that they encreased as learning improved, but swarmed on its decline. It was then, that every work of taste was buried in long comments, every useful subject in morals was distinguished away into casuistry, and doubt and subtilty characterized the learning of the age. Metrodorus, Valerius Probus, Aulus Gellius, Pedianus, Boethius, and an hundred others, to be acquainted with whom, might shew much reading, and but little judgment; these, I say, made choice each of an author, and delivered all their load of learning on his back; shame to our ancestors,

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 19

many of their works have reached our times entire, while Tacitus himself has suffered mutilation.

IN a word, the commonwealth of literature, was at last wholly overrun by these studious triflers. Men of real genius, were lost in the multitude, or, as in a world of fools, it were folly to aim at being an only exception, obliged to conform to every prevailing absurdity of the times. Original productions seldom appeared, and learning, as if grown superannuated, bestowed all its panegyric upon the vigour of its youth, and turned encomiast upon its former achievements.

It is to these, then, that the depravation of ancient polite learning, is principally to be ascribed. By them it was separated



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rated from common sense, and made the proper employment of speculative idlers. Men bred up among books, and seeing nature only by reflection, could do little, except hunt after perplexity and confusion. The public, therefore, with reason rejected learning, when thus rendered barren, tho' voluminous ; for we may be assured, that the generality of mankind never lose a passion for letters, while they continue to be either amusing or useful.

It was such writers as these, that rendered learning unfit for uniting and strengthening civil society, or for promoting the views of ambition. True philosophy had kept the Græcian states cemented into one effective body, more than any law for that purpose ; and the Etrurian philosophy, which prevailed in the first ages of Rome,  
inspired

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 21

inspired those patriot virtues, which paved the way to universal empire. But by the labours of commentators, when philosophy became abstruse, or triflingly minute, when doubt was presented instead of knowledge, when the orator was taught to charm the multitude with the music of his periods, and pronounced a declamation, that might be sung as well as spoken, and often upon subjects wholly fictitious; in such circumstances, learning was entirely unsuited to all the purposes of government, or the designs of the ambitious. As long as the sciences could influence the state, and its politics were strengthened by them, so long did the community give them countenance and protection. But the wiser part of mankind would not be imposed upon by unintelligible jargon, nor, like the knight in Pantagruel, swallow a chimera for a

## 22 THE PRESENT STATE

breakfast, though even cooked by Aristotle. As the philosopher grew useless in the state, he also became contemptible. In the times of Lucian, he was chiefly remarkable for his avarice, his impudence, and his beard.

UNDER the auspicious influence of genius, arts and sciences grew up together, and mutually illustrated each other. But when once Pedants became lawgivers, the sciences began to want grace, and the polite arts solidity; these grew crabbed and sour, those meretricious and gawdy; the philosopher became disgustingly precise, and the poet, ever straining after grace, caught only finery.

THESE men also contributed to obstruct the progress of wisdom, by addicting their  
readers

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 23

readers to one particular sect, or some favourite science. They generally carried on a petty traffic in some little creek ; within that they busily plied about, and drove an insignificant trade ; but never ventured out into the great ocean of knowledge, nor went beyond the bounds that chance, conceit, or laziness, had first prescribed their enquiries. Their disciples, instead of aiming at being originals themselves, became imitators of that merit alone, which was constantly proposed for their admiration. In exercises of this kind, the most stupid are generally most successful ; for there is not in nature, a more imitative animal than a dunce.

FROM hence ancient learning may be distinguished into three periods. Its commencement, or the age of poets ; its ma-

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turity, or the age of philosophers ; and its decline, or the age of critics. In the poetical age, commentators were very few, but might have, in some respects, been useful. In its philosophical, their assistance must necessarily become obnoxious, yet, as if the nearer we approached perfection, the more we stood in need of their directions, in this period they began to grow numerous. But when polite learning was no more, then it was those literary law-givers made the most formidable appearance. *Corruptissima republica, plurimæ leges.* TACIT.

BUT let us take a more distinct view of those ages of ignorance, in which false refinement had involved mankind, and see how far they resemble our own.

CHAP.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 25

### C H A P. III.

#### *A view of the obscure ages.*

**W**HATEVER the skill of any country may be in the sciences, it is from its excellence in polite learning alone, that it must expect a character from posterity. The poet and the historian, are they who diffuse a lustre upon the age, and the philosopher scarce acquires any applause, unless his character be introduced to the vulgar by their mediation.

THE obscure ages, which succeeded the decline of the Roman empire, are a striking instance of the truth of this assertion. Whatever period of those ill-fated times we happen to turn to, we shall perceive more skill in the sciences among the professors

## 26 THE PRESENT STATE

feffors of them, more abstruse and deeper enquiry into every philosophical subject, and a greater shew of subtilty and close reasoning, than in the most enlightened ages of all antiquity. But their writings were mere speculative amusements, and all their researches exhausted upon trifles. Unskilled in the arts of adorning their knowledge, or adapting it to common sense, their voluminous productions rest peacefully in our libraries, or, at best, are enquired after from motives of curiosity, not by the scholar, but the virtuoso.

I AM not insensible, that several late French historians, have exhibited the obscure ages in a very different light; they have represented them, as utterly ignorant both of arts and sciences, buried in the profoundest darkness, or only illuminated  
with

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 27

with a feeble gleam, which, like an expiring taper, rose and sunk by intervals. Such assertions, however, though they serve to help out the declaimer, should be cautiously admitted by the historian. For instance, the tenth century is particularly distinguished by posterity, with the appellation of obscure. Yet even in this, the reader's memory may possibly suggest the names of some, whose works, still preserved, discover a most extensive erudition, though rendered almost useless by affectation and obscurity. A few of their names and writings may be mentioned, which will serve at once to confirm what I assert, and give the reader an idea of what kind of learning an age declining into obscurity chiefly chuses to cultivate.

ABOUT



## 28 THE PRESENT STATE.

ABOUT the tenth century, flourished Leo the philosopher. We have seven volumes folio of his collections of laws, published at Paris, 1647. He wrote upon the art military, and understood also astronomy, and judicial astrology. He was seven times more voluminous than Plato.

SOLOMON, the German, wrote a most elegant dictionary of the Latin tongue, still preserved in the university of Louvain; Pantaleon, in the lives of his illustrious countrymen, speaks of it in the warmest strains of rapture. Dictionary writing was, at that time, much in fashion.

CONSTANTINE Porphyrogeneta, a man universally skilled in the sciences. His tracts on the administration of an empire, on tactics, and on laws, were published

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 29

ed some years since at Leyden. His court, for he was emperor of the east, was resorted to by the learned from all parts of the world.

LUITPRANDUS, a most voluminous historian, particularly famous for the history of his own times. The compliments paid him as a writer, are said to exceed even his own voluminous productions. I cannot pass over one of a latter date made him by a German divine. *Luitprandus nunquam Luitprando dissimilis.*

ALFRIC composed several grammars and dictionaries still preserved among the curious.

POPE SYLVESTER the eleventh, wrote a treatise on the sphere, on arithmetic, and geometry,

### 30 THE PRESENT STATE

geometry, published some years since at Paris.

MICHAEL PSELLUS lived in this age, whose books in the sciences, I will not scruple to assert, contain more learning than those of any one of the earlier ages : his erudition was indeed amazing, and he was as voluminous as he was learned. The character given him by Allatius has, perhaps, more truth in it than will be granted by those who have seen none of his productions. There was, says he, no science with which he was unacquainted, none which he did not write something upon, and none which he did not leave better than he found it. To mention his works, would be endless. His commentaries on Aristotle alone amount to three folios.

BERTHOLDUS

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 31

**BERTHOLDUS TEUTONICUS**, a very voluminous historian. He was a politician, and wrote against the government under which he lived; but most of his writings, though not all, are lost:

**CONSTANTINUS AFER**, a philosopher and physician. We have remaining but two volumes folio of his philological performances. However, the historian, who prefixes the life of the author to his works, says, that he wrote many more, as he kept on writing during the course of a long life.

**LAMBERTUS** published an universal history about this time, which has been printed at Francfort in folio. An universal history in one folio! If he had consulted with his bookseller, he would have spun it  
out

## 32 THE PRESENT STATE

out to ten at least; but Lambertus might have had too much modesty.

By this time, the reader perceives the spirit of learning, which at that time prevailed. The ignorance of the age was not owing to a dislike of knowledge, but a false standard of taste was erected, and a wrong direction given to philosophical enquiry. It was the fashion of the day to write dictionaries, commentaries, and compilations, and to evaporate in a folio, the spirit that could scarce have sufficed for an epigram. The most barbarous times had men of learning, if commentators, compilers, polemic divines, and intricate metaphysicians, deserved the title.

I HAVE mentioned but a very inconsiderable number of the writers in this age  
of

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 33

of obscurity. The multiplicity of their publications will, at least, equal those of any similar period of the most polite antiquity. As, therefore, the writers of those times are almost entirely forgotten, we may infer, that the number of publications alone will never secure any age whatsoever from oblivion. Nor can printing, contrary to what Mr. Baumelle has remarked, prevent literary decline for the future, since it only encreases the number of books, without advancing their intrinsic merit.

D

CHAP.

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### CHAP. IV.

*Of the present state of polite learning in Italy.*

**F**ROM ancient we are now come to modern times, and in running over Europe, we shall find that, wherever learning has been cultivated; it has flourished by the same advantages as in Greece and Rome; and that, wherever it has declined, it sinks by the same causes of decay.

DANTE, the poet of Italy, who wrote in the 13th century, was the first who attempted to bring learning from the cloister into the community, and paint human nature in a language adapted to modern manners. He addressed a barbarous people in a method suited to their apprehensions; united purgatory

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 35

gatory and the river Styx, St. Peter and Virgil, heaven and hell together, and shews a strange mixture of good sense and absurdity. The truth is, he owes most of his reputation to the obscurity of the times in which he lived. As in the land of Benin a man may pass for a prodigy of parts who can read, so in an age of barbarity a small degree of excellence ensures success. But it was great merit in him to have lifted up the standard of nature, in spite of all the opposition and the persecution he received from cotemporary criticism. To this standard every succeeding genius resorted; the germ of every art and science began to unfold, and to imitate nature was found to be the surest way of imitating antiquity. In a century or two after, modern Italy might justly boast of rivalling ancient Rome; equal in some branches of po-



## 36. THE PRESENT STATE

lite learning, and not far surpassed in others.

THEY soon however fell from emulating the wonders of antiquity into simple admiration. As if the word had been given when Vida and Tasso wrote on the arts of poetry, the whole swarm of critics was up; the Speroni's of the age attempted to be awkwardly merry; and the virtuosi and the Nascotti sat upon the merits of every cotemporary performance. After the age of Clement VII. the Italians seemed to think that there was more merit in praising or censuring well, than in writing well; almost every subsequent performance since their time being designed rather to shew the excellence of the critic's taste than his genius; one or two poets indeed seem at present born to redeem the honour of their country. Metastasio has  
restored

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 37

restored nature in all her simplicity. And Maffei is the first that has introduced a tragedy among his countrymen without a love-plot. Perhaps the Sampson of Milton, and the Athalia of Racine, might have been his guides in such an attempt. But two poets in an age are not sufficient to revive the splendor of decaying genius; nor should we consider them as the standard, by which to characterize a nation. Our measures of literary reputation must be taken rather from that numerous class of men who, placed above the vulgar, are yet beneath the great, and who confer fame on others without receiving any portion of it themselves.

In Italy, then, we shall no where find a stronger passion for the arts of taste, yet no country making more feeble efforts to pro-

### 38 THE PRESENT STATE

more either. The Virtuosi and Filósofi seem to have divided the Encyclopedia between each other. Both inviolably attach'd to their respective pursuits, and from an opposition of character, each holding the other in the most sovereign contempt. The Virtuosi, professed critics of beauty in the works of art, judge of medals by the smell, and pictures by feeling. In statuary hang over a fragment with the most ardent gaze of admiration; though wanting the head and the other extremities, if dug from a ruin the *Torse* becomes inestimable. An unintelligible monument of Etruscan barbarity cannot be sufficiently prized; and any thing from Herculaneum becomes rapturous. When the intellectual taste is thus decayed, its relishes become false, and, like that of sense, nothing will satisfy, but what is best suited to feed the disease.

POETRY

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 39

POETRY is no longer among them an imitation of what we see, but of what a visionary might wish. The zephyr breathes the most exquisite perfume, the trees wear eternal verdure; fauns, and dryads, and hamadryads, stand ready to fan the sultry shepherdess, who has forgot indeed the pretinesses with which Guarini's shepherdesses have been reproached, but is so simple and innocent, as often to have no meaning. Happy country, where the pastoral age begins to revive! Where the wits even of Rome are united into a rural groupe of nymphs and swains under the appellation of modern Arcadians. Where, in the midst of porticos, processions, and cavalcades, abbés turned shepherds, and shepherdesses without sheep, indulge their innocent *divertimenti*.

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THE Filoſofi are entirely different from the former. As thoſe pretend to have got their knowledge from converſing with the living and polite, ſo theſe boaſt of having theirs from books and ſtudy. Bred up all their lives in colleges, they have there learned to think in track, ſervilely to follow the leader of their ſect, and only to adopt ſuch opinions, as their univerſities, or the inquisition, are pleaſed to allow. By theſe means, they are behind the reſt of Europe, in ſeveral modern improvements. Afraid to think for themſelves; and their univerſities ſeldom admit opinions as true, till univerſally received among the reſt of mankind. In ſhort, were I to perſonize my ideas of learning in this country, I would repreſent it in the tawdry habits of the ſtage, or elſe in the more homely guiſe of bearded ſchool-philophy.

C H A P.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 41

### C H A P. V.

#### *Of polite learning in Germany,*

**I**F we examine the state of learning in Germany, we shall find that the Germans early discovered a passion for polite literature; but unhappily, like conquerors, who, invading the dominions of others, leave their own to desolation, instead of studying the German tongue, they continue to write in Latin; thus, while they cultivated an obsolete language, and vainly laboured to apply it to modern manners, they neglected their own.

At the same time also they began at the wrong end, I mean by being commentators, and though they have given many instances of their industry, they have scarce  
afforded

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afforded any of genius. If criticism could have improved the taste of a people, the Germans would have been the most polite nation alive. We shall no where behold the learned wear a more important appearance than here; no where more dignified with professorships, or dressed out in the fopperies of scholastic finery. However, they seem to earn all the honours of this kind which they enjoy. Their assiduity is unparalleled; and did they employ half those hours on study, which they bestow on reading, we might be induced to pity, as well as praise, their painful pre-eminence. But guilty of a fault, too common to great readers, they write through volumes, while they do not think through a page. Never fatigued themselves, they think the reader can never be weary; so they drone on, saying all that can be said.

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## OF POLITE LEARNING. 43

on the subject, not selecting what may be advanced to the purpose. Were angels to write books, they never would write folios.

BUT let the Germans have their due ; if they are dull, no nation alive assumes a more laudable solemnity, or better understands all the decorums of stupidity. Let the discourse of a professor run on never so heavily, it cannot be irksome to his dosing pupils, who frequently lend him sympathetic nods of approbation: I have sometimes attended their disputes at gradation. On this occasion, they often dispense with their gravity, and seem really all alive. The disputes are managed between the followers of Cartesius, whose exploded system they continue to call the new philosophy, and those of Aristotle. Though both parties  
are



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are in the wrong, they argue with an obstinacy worthy the cause of truth ; Nego, Probo, and Distinguo, grow loud ; the disputants become warm, the moderator cannot be heard, the audience take part in the debate, till at last the whole hall buzzes with sophistry and error,

THERE are, it is true, several societies in this country, which are chiefly calculated to promote knowlege. His late majesty as elector of Hanover has established one at Gottingen, at an expence of not less than an hundred thousand pound. This university has already pickled monsters, and dissected live puppies without number. Their transactions have been published in the learned world at proper intervals, since their institution ; and will, it is hoped, one day give them just reputation. But had the  
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## OF POLITE LEARNING. 45

the fourth part of the immense sum above-mentioned, been given in proper rewards to genius, in some neighbouring countries, it would have rendered the name of the donor immortal, and added to the real interests of society.

YET it ought to be observed, that of late learning has been patronized here by a prince, who, in the humblest station, would have been the first of mankind. The society established by the king of Prussia at Berlin, is one of the finest literary institutions that any age or nation has produced. This academy comprehends all the sciences under four different classes; and although the object of each is different, and admits of being separately treated, yet these classes mutually influence the progress of each other, and concur in the same general design.

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fig. Experimental philosophy, mathematics, metaphysics, and polite literature, are here carried on together. The members are not collected from among the students of some obscure seminary, or the wits of a metropolis, but chosen from all the literati of Europe, supported by the bounty, and ornamented by the productions of their royal founder. We can easily discern, how much such an institution excels any other now subsisting. One fundamental error among societies of this kind, is their addicting themselves to one branch of science, or some particular part of polite learning. Thus, in Germany, there are no where so many establishments of this nature ; but as they generally profess the promotion of natural or medical knowledge, he who reads their Acta, will only find an obscure far-rago of experiments, most frequently terminated

minated by no resulting phænomena. To make experiments is, I own, the only way to promote natural knowlege; but to treasure up every unsuccessful enquiry into nature, or to communicate every experiment without conclusion, is not to promote science, but oppress it. Had the members of these societies enlarged their plans, and taken in art as well as science, one part of knowlege would have repressed any faulty luxuriance in the other, and all would have mutually assisted each other's promotion. Besides, the society which, with a contempt of all collateral assistance, admits of members skilled in one science only, whatever their diligence, or labour may be, will lose much time in the discovery of such truths as are well known already to the learned in a different line, consequently their progress must be slow in gaining a  
proper

## 48 THE PRESENT STATE

proper eminence; from which to view their subject, and their strength will be exhausted in attaining the station from whence they should have set out. With regard to the Royal Society of London, the greatest, and, perhaps, the oldest institution of the kind, had it widened the basis of its institution, though they might not have propagated more discoveries, they would probably have delivered them in a more pleasing and compendious form. They would have been free from the contempt of the ill-natured, and the raillery of the wit, for which, even candour must allow, there is but too much foundation. But the Berlin academy is subject to none of all the inconveniencies, but every one of its individuals is in a capacity of deriving more from the common stock than he contributes to it, while each academician serves as a check upon the rest of his fellows.

YET,

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 49

Yet, very probably, even this fine institution will soon decay. As it rose, so it will decline, with its great encourager. The society, if I may so speak, is artificially supported; the introduction of foreigners of learning was right; but in adopting a foreign language also, I mean the French, in which all the transactions are to be published, and questions debated; in this there was an error. As I have already hinted, the language of the natives of every country, should be also the language of its polite learning. To figure in polite learning, every country should make their own language, from their own manners; nor will they ever succeed by introducing that of another, which has been formed from manners which are different. Besides, an academy composed of foreigners, must still be re-

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cruited from abroad, unless all the natives of the country, to which it belongs, are in a capacity of becoming candidates for its honours, or rewards. While France therefore continues to supply Berlin, polite learning will flourish; but when royal favour is withdrawn, learning will return to its natural country.

CHAP.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 51

### C H A P. VI.

*Of polite learning in Holland and some other countries of Europe.*

**H**OLLAND, at first view, appears to have some pretensions to polite learning. It may be regarded as the great emporium, not less of literature, than of every other commodity. Here, though destitute of what may be properly called a language of their own, all the languages are understood, cultivated and spoken. All useful inventions in arts, and new discoveries in science, are published here almost as soon as at the places which first produced them. Its individuals have the same faults, however, with the Germans, of making more use of their memory, than their judgment. The



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chief employment of their literati is to criticise, or answer the new performances which appear elsewhere.

A DEARTH of wit in France or England, naturally produces a scarcity in Holland. What Ovid says of Eccho, may be applied here, *Nec loqui prius ipsa didicit nec reticere loquenti*. They wait till something new comes out from others; examine its merits, and reject it, or make it reverberate through the rest of Europe.

AFTER all, I know not whether they should be allowed any national character for polite learning. All their taste is derived to them from neighbouring nations, and that in a language not their own. They somewhat resemble their brokers,  
who

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 53

who trade for immense sums, without having any capital.

THE other countries of Europe may be considered as immersed in ignorance, or making but feeble efforts to rise. Spain has long fallen from amazing Europe with her wit, to amusing them with the greatness of her catholic credulity. Rome considers her as the most favourite of all her children, and school-divinity still reigns there in triumph. In spite of all attempts of the marquis D'ensanada, who saw with regret the barbarity of his country-men, and bravely offered to oppose it, by introducing new systems of learning, and suppressing the seminaries of monastic ignorance, in spite of the ingenuity of Padré Feijo, whose book of

## 54 THE PRESENT STATE

vulgar errors so finely exposes the monkish stupidity of the times, the religious have prevailed. Ensanada has been banished, and now lives in exile; Feijo has incurred the hatred and contempt of every bigot, whose errors he has attempted to oppose, and feels, no doubt, the unremitting displeasure of the priesthood. Persecution is a tribute, the Great must ever pay for preheminance.

It is a little extraordinary, however, how Spain, whose genius is naturally fine, should be so much behind the rest of Europe, in this particular; or why school-divinity should hold its ground there, for near six hundred years. The reason must be, that philosophical opinions, which are otherwise transient, acquire stability  
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## OF POLITE LEARNING. 55

in proportion, as they are connected with the laws of the country, and philosophy and law have no where been so closely united as here.

SWEDEN has of late made some attempts in polite learning, in its own language: Count Tessin's instructions to the prince his pupil, are no bad beginning. If the muses can fix their residence so far northward, perhaps, no country bids so fair for their reception. They have, I am told, a language rude, but energetic; if so, it will bear a polish; they have also a jealous sense of liberty, and that strength of thinking, peculiar to northern climates, without its attendant ferocity. They will certainly, in time, produce somewhat great, if their intestine divisions do not unhappily prevent them.

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THE history of polite learning in Denmark, may be comprised in the life of one single man; it rose and fell with the late famous baron Holberg. This was, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary personages that has done honour to the present century. His being the son of a private centinel, did not abate the ardour of his ambition; for he learned to read, though without a master. Upon the death of his father, being left intirely destitute, he was involved in all that distress, which is common among the poor, and of which the Great have scarce any idea. However, though only a boy of nine years old, he still persisted in pursuing his studies, travelled about from school to school, and begg'd his learning and his bread.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 57

bread. When at the age of seventeen, instead of applying himself to any of the lower occupations, which seem best adapted to such circumstances, he was resolved to travel for improvement, from Norway the place of his birth, to Copenhagen the capital city of Denmark. He lived there by teaching French, at the same time avoiding no opportunity of improvement, that his scanty funds could permit. But his ambition was not to be restrained, or his thirst of knowledge satisfied, until he had seen the world. Without money, recommendations or friends, he undertook to set out upon his travels, and make the tour of Europe on foot. A good voice, and a trifling skill in music, were the only finances he had to support an undertaking so extensive; so he travelled by day, and at night sung

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fung at the doors of peasants houses, to get himself a lodging. In this manner, while yet very young, Holberg passed through France, Germany, and Holland, and coming over to England, took up his residence for two years in the university of Oxford. Here, he subsisted by teaching French and music, and wrote his universal history, his earliest, but worst performance. Furnished with all the learning of Europe, he at last thought proper to return to Copenhagen, where his ingenious productions quickly gained him that favour he deserved. He composed not less than eighteen comedies; those in his own language are said to excel, and those which are translated into French have peculiar merit. He was honoured with nobility, and enriched by the bounty of the king; so that a life begun in contempt

tempt and penury, ended in opulence and esteem.

THUS we see, in what a low state polite learning is in the countries I have mentioned, either past its prime or not yet arrived at maturity. And though the sketch I have drawn be general, yet it was, for the most part, taken upon the spot. I am sensible, however, of the impropriety of national reflexion; and did not truth bias me more than inclination in this particular, I should, instead of the account already given, have presented the reader with a panegyric on many of the individuals of every country, whose merits deserve the warmest strains of praise, Apostol Zeno, Algarotti Goldoni, Muratori, and Stay, in Italy; Haller, Klopstock, and Rabner, in Germany; Muschen-



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Muschenbrook, and Gaubius, in Holland; all deserve the highest applause. Men like these, while the great, and the avaricious of this world, are contriving means to aggravate national hatred; and, perhaps, fonder of satisfying vanity than justice, are willing to make the world uneasy, because themselves are so; continue ever the friends of man. Men like these, united by one bond, pursuing one design, spend their labour, and their lives, in making their fellow-creatures happy, and in repairing the breaches caused by ambition. In this light, the meanest philosopher, though all his possessions are his lamp or his cell, is more truly valuable than he, whose name echoes to the shout of the million, and who stands in all the glare of admiration. In this light, though poverty and contemptuous neglect are all

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 61

all the wages of his good will from mankind, yet the rectitude of his intention is an ample recompence; and self-applause for the present, and the alluring prospect of fame for futurity, reward his labours. The perspective of life brightens upon us, when terminated by an object so charming. Every intermediate image of want, banishment, or sorrow, receives a lustre from its distant influence. With this in view, the patriot, philosopher, and poet, have often looked with calmness on disgrace and famine, and rested on their straw with chearful serenity. Even the last terrors of departing nature abate of their severity, and look kindly on him, who considers his sufferings as a passport to immortality, and lays his sorrows on the bed of fame.

**CHAP.**

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### C H A P. VII.

#### *Of polite learning in France.*

**W**E have hitherto seen, that wherever the poet was permitted to begin by improving his native language, polite learning flourished; but where the critic undertook the same task, it has never risen to any degree of perfection. Let us now examine the merits of modern learning in France and England; where, though it may be on the decline, yet it is still capable of retrieving much of its former splendor. In other places, learning has not yet been planted, or has suffered a total decay. To attempt amendment there, would be only like the application of remedies to an insensible or a mortified part;

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 63

part; but here there is still life, and there is hope. And indeed the French themselves are so far from giving into any despondence of this kind, that, on the contrary, they admire the progress they are daily making in every science; that levity for which we are apt to despise this nation, is probably the principal source of their happiness. An agreeable oblivion of past pleasures, a freedom from solicitude about future ones, and a poignant zest of every present enjoyment, if they be not philosophy, are at least excellent substitutes. By this they are taught to regard the period in which they live with admiration. The present manners, and the present conversation, surpass all that preceded. A similar enthusiasm as strongly tinctures their learning, and their taste. While we,  
with

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with a despondence characteristic of our nation, are for removing back British excellence to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, our more happy rivals of the continent cry up the writers of the present times with rapture, and regard the age of Lewis XV. as the true Augustan age of France.

THE truth is, their present writers have not fallen so far short of the merits of their ancestors, as ours have done. That self-sufficiency, now mentioned, may have been of service to them in this particular. By fancying themselves superior to their ancestors, they have been encouraged to enter the lists with confidence; and by not being dazzled at the splendor of another's reputation, have sometimes had sagacity

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gacity to mark out an unbeaten path to fame, for themselves.

OTHER causes also may be assigned, that their second growth of genius is still more vigorous than ours. Their encouragements to merit are more skilfully directed, the link of patronage and learning still continues unbroken. The French nobility have certainly a most pleasing way of satisfying the vanity of an author, without indulging his avarice. A man of literary merit, is sure of being caressed by the Great, though seldom enriched. His pension from the crown just supplies half a competence, and the sale of his labours makes some small addition to his circumstances; thus the author leads a life of splendid poverty, and seldom becomes wealthy or indolent enough, to discontinue an exertion of those abilities,

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by

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by which he rose. With the English, it is different; our writers of rising merit are generally neglected; while the few of an established reputation are overpaid by luxurious affluence. The young encounter every hardship which generally attends upon aspiring indigence; the old, enjoy the vulgar, and, perhaps, the more prudent satisfaction of putting riches in competition with fame. Those are often seen to spend their youth in want and obscurity; these are sometimes found to lead an old age of indolence and avarice. But such treatment must naturally be expected from Englishmen, whose national character it is, to be slow and cautious in making friends, but violent in friendships once contracted. The English nobility, in short, are often known to give greater rewards to genius than the  
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## OF POLITE LEARNING. 67

the French, who, however, are much more judicious in the application of their empty favours.

THE fair sex in France have also not a little contributed to prevent the decline of taste and literature, by expecting such qualifications in their admirers. A man of fashion at Paris, however contemptible we may think him here, must be acquainted with the reigning modes of philosophy as well as of dress, to be able to entertain his mistress agreeably. The sprightly pedants are not to be caught by dumb shew, by the squeeze of a hand, or the ogling of a broad eye: but must be pursued at once through all the labyrinths of the Newtonian system, or the metaphysics of Locke. I have seen as bright a circle of beauty at the chymical lectures



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of Rouelle, as gracing the court at Versailles. And indeed wisdom never appears so charming, as when graced and protected by beauty.

To these advantages may be added the reception of their language in the different courts of Europe. An author, who excels, is sure of having all the polite for admirers, and is encouraged to write by the pleasing expectation of universal fame. Add to this, that those countries who can make nothing good from their own language, have lately begun to write in this, some of whose productions contribute to support the present literary reputation of France.

THERE are therefore many among the French, who do honour to the present  
age,

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 69

age, and whose writings will be transmitted to posterity with an ample share of fame : some of the most celebrated, are as follow ;

VOLTAIRE, whose voluminous, yet spirited productions, are too well known to require an eulogy ; does he not resemble the champion mentioned by Xenophon, of great reputation in all the gymnastic exercises united, but inferior to each champion singly, who excels only in one ?

MONTESQUIEU, a name equally deserving fame with the former. The Spirit of Laws is an instance, how much genius is able to lead learning. His system has been adopted by the literati ; and yet is it not possible for opinions equally plausible to be formed upon opposite princi-

## 70 THE PRESENT STATE

ples, if a genius like his, could be found to attempt such an undertaking? He seems more a poet than a philosopher.

ROUSSEAU of Geneva. A professed man-hater, or, more properly speaking, a philosopher enraged with one half of mankind, because they unavoidably make the other half unhappy. Such sentiments are generally the result of much good nature, and little experience.

PYRON, an author possessed of as much wit as any man alive, yet with as little prudence, to turn to his own advantage. A comedy of his, called *La Metromanie*, is the best theatrical production, that has appeared of late in Europe. But I know not, whether I should most commend his genius, or censure his obscenity;

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obscenity ; his ode à Priape, has justly excluded him from a place in the academy of Belles Lettrés. However, the good-natured Montesquieu, by his interest, procured the starving bard a trifling pension. His own epitaph was all the revenge he took upon the academy for being repulsed.

*Cy Git Pyron qui ne fut jamais rien  
Pas même Academicien.*

CREBILLON, junior. A writer of real merit, but guilty of the same indelicate faults with the former. Wit employed in dressing up obscenity, is like the art used in painting a corpse ; it may be thus rendered tolerable to one sense, but fails not quickly to offend some other.

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**GRESSET**, agreeable and easy. His comedy called the *Mechant*, and an humorous poem, entitled *Ver-vert*, have original merit. He was bred a jesuit, but his wit procured his dismissal from the society. This last work particularly, could expect no pardon from the Convent, being a fatyr against nunneries!

**DALEMBERT**, has united an extensive skill in scientifical learning, with the most refined taste for the polite arts. His excellence in both, have procured him a seat in each academy.

**DIDEROT**, an elegant writer and subtil reasoner. He is the supposed author of the famous *Thesis*, which the abbé Prade sustained before the doctors of the Sorbonne.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 73

bonne. It was levelled against Christianity, and the Sorbonne too hastily gave it their sanction. They perceived its purport, however, when it was too late. The college was brought into some contempt, and the abbé obliged to take refuge at the court of Berlin.

THE marquis D'Argens attempts to add the character of a philosopher to the vices of a debauchée.

THE catalogue might be encreased with several other authors of merit, such as Marivaux, Le Franc, Saint Foix, Destouches, and Modonville; but let it suffice to say, that by these, the character of the present age is tolerably supported. Tho' their poets seldom rise to fine enthusiasm, they never sink into absurdity; though they

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they fail to astonish, they are generally possessed of talents to please.

THE age of Lewis XIV. notwithstanding these respectable names, is still vastly superior. For beside the general tendency of critical corruption, which shall be spoken of by and by, there are other symptoms which indicate a decline. There is, for instance, a fondness for scepticism, which runs through the works of some of their most applauded writers, and which the numerous class of their imitators have contributed to diffuse. Nothing can be a more certain sign, that genius is in the wane, than its being obliged to fly to paradox for support, and attempting to be erroneously agreeable. A man, who with all the impotence of wit, and all the eager desires of infidelity, writes  
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against

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 75

against the religion of his country, may raise doubts, but will never give conviction; all he can do is to render society less happy than he found it. It was a good manner, which the father of the late poet Saint Foix, took to reclaim his son from this juvenile error. The young poet had shut himself up for some time in his study, and his father, willing to know what had engaged his attention so closely, upon entering, found him busied in drawing up a new system of religion, and endeavouring to shew the absurdity of that already established. The old man knew by experience, that it was useless to endeavour to convince a vain young man by right reason; so only desired his company up stairs. When come into the father's apartment, he takes his son by the hand, and drawing



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ing back a curtain at one end of the room, discovered a crucifix exquisitely painted. 'My son, says he, you desire to change the religion of your country, behold the fate of a reformer.' The truth is, vanity is more apt to misguide men than false reasoning; as some had rather be conspicuous in a mob, than unnoticed even in privy council, so others chuse rather to be foremost in the retinue of error, than follow in the train of truth. What influence the conduct of such writers may have on the morals of a people, is not my business here to determine. Certain I am, that it has a manifest tendency to subvert the literary merits of the country in view. The change of religion in every nation, has hitherto produced barbarism and ignorance, and such will be probably

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 77

bly its consequences in every future period. For when the laws, and the opinions of society, are made to clash, harmony is dissolved, and all the arts of peace unavoidably crushed in the encounter.

THE writers of this country have of late also fallen into a method of considering every part of art and science, as arising from simple principles. The success of Montesquieu, and one or two more, has induced all the subordinate ranks of genius into vicious imitation. To this end they turn to our view that side of the subject, which contributes to support their hypothesis, while the objections are generally passed over in silence. Thus an universal system rises from a partial representation of the question, an Whole is concluded from a Part, a book appears entirely new, and

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and the fancy-built fabric is stiled for a short time very ingenious. In this manner we have seen of late, almost every subject in morals, natural history, politics, œconomy, and commerce treated; subjects naturally proceeding on many principles; and some even opposite to each other, are all taught to proceed along the line of systematic simplicity, and continue, like other agreeable falsehoods, extremely pleasing, till they are detected.

I must still add another fault of a nature somewhat similar to the former. As those above mentioned are for contracting a single science into system, so those I am going to speak of are for drawing up a system of all the sciences united. Such undertakings as these are carried on by different writers cemented into one body,  
and

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and concurring in the same design, by the mediation of a bookseller. From these inauspicious combinations, proceed those monsters of learning, the *Treyoux*, *Encyclopedie's*, and *Bibliotheques* of the age. In making these, men of every rank in literature are employed, wits and dunces contribute their share, and Diderot, as well as Desmaretz, are candidates for oblivion. The genius of the first, supplies the gale of favour; and the latter adds, the useful ballast of stupidity. By such means, the enormous mass heavily makes its way among the public, and to borrow a bookseller's phrase, the whole impression moves off. These great collections of learning, may serve to make us inwardly repine at our own ignorance, may serve, when gilt and lettered, to adorn the lower shelves of a regular library; but woe to the reader,  
who,

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who, not daunted at the immense distance between one great pasteboard and the other, opens the volume and explores his way through a region so extensive, but barren of entertainment. No unexpected landscape there to delight the imagination; no diversity of prospect to cheat the painful journey; he sees the wide extended desert lie before him; what is past only increases his terror of what is to come. His course is not half finished, he looks behind him with affright, and forward with despair. Perseverance is at last overcome, and a night of oblivion lends its friendly aid to terminate the perplexity.

C H A P.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 18

### CHAP. IX.

#### *Of learning in Great Britain.*

**T**O acquire a character for learning among the English at present, it is necessary to know much more than is either important or useful. It seems the spirit of the times for men here to exhaust their natural sagacity in exploring the intricacies of another man's thought, and thus never to have leisure to think for themselves; others have carried on learning from that stage, where the good sense of our ancestors have thought it too minute or too speculative to instruct or amuse. By the industry of such, the sciences, which in themselves are easy of access, affright the  
G learner

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learner with the severity of their appearance. He sees them surrounded with speculation and subtilty, placed there by their professors as if with a view of deterring his approach. From hence it happens, that the generality of readers fly from the scholar to the compiler, who offers them a more safe and speedy conveyance.

FROM this fault also arises that mutual contempt between the scholar and the man of the world, of which every day's experience furnisheth instances.

THE man of taste, however, stands neuter in this controversy; he seems placed in a middle station, between the world and the cell, between learning and common sense. He teaches the vulgar on what part of a character to lay the emphasis of praise, and the

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 83

the scholar where to point his application so as to deserve it. By his means, even the philosopher acquires popular applause, and all that are truly great the admiration of posterity. By means of polite learning alone, the patriot and the hero, the man who praiseth virtue, and he who practices it, who fights successfully for his country, or who dies in its defence, becomes immortal. But this taste now seems cultivated with less ardour than formerly, and consequently the public must one day expect to see the advantages arising from it, and the exquisite pleasures it affords our leisure entirely annihilated. For if, as it should seem, the Rewards of genius are improperly directed; if those who are capable of supporting the honour of the times by their writings, prefer opulence to fame; if the Stage should be shut to writers of merit, and open only to interest or intrigue.



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If such should happen to be the vile complexion of the times, (and that it is nearly so we shall shortly see) the very virtue of the age will be forgotten by posterity; and nothing remembered, except our filling a chasm in the registers of time, or having served to continue the species.

C H A P.

C H A P. X.

*Of rewarding Genius in England.*

THESE is nothing authors are more apt to lament, than want of encouragement from the age. Whatever their differences in other respects, they are all ready to unite in this complaint, and each indirectly offers himself as an instance of the truth of his assertion.

THE benefited divine, whose wants are only imaginary, expostulates as bitterly as the poorest author. Should interest, or good fortune, advance the divine to a bishopric, or the poor son of Parnassus into that place which the other has resign'd; both are authors no longer, the one goes to prayers

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once a day, kneels upon cushions of velvet, and thanks gracious heaven for having made the circumstances of all mankind so extremely happy; the other batten on all the delicacies of life, enjoys his wife and his easy chair, and sometimes, for the sake of conversation, deplores the luxury of these degenerate days.

ALL encouragements to merit are therefore misapplied, which make the author too rich to continue his profession. There can be nothing more just than the old observation, that authors, like running horses, should be fed but not fattened. If we would continue them in our service, we should reward them with a little money and a great deal of praise, still keeping their avarice subservient to their ambition. Not that I think a writer incapable of filling an employment with dignity.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 87

dignity. I would only insinuate, that when made a bishop or statesman, he will continue to please us as a writer no longer. As to resume a former allusion, the running horse, when fattened, will still be fit for very useful purposes, though unqualified for a courser.

No nation gives greater encouragements to learning than we do; yet at the same time, none are so injudicious in the application. We seem to confer them with the same view, that statesmen have been known to grant employments at court, rather as bribes to silence, than incentives to emulation,

UPON this principle, all our magnificent endowments of colleges are erroneous, and at best, more frequently enrich the prudent

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than reward the ingenious. A lad whose passions are not strong enough in youth to mislead him from that path of science, which his tutors, and not his inclinations, have chalked out, by four or five years perseverance, may probably obtain every advantage and honour his college can bestow. I forget whether the simile has been used before, but I would compare the man, whose youth has been thus past in the tranquillity of dispassionate prudence, to liquors which never ferment, and consequently, continue always muddy. Passions may raise a commotion in the youthful breast, but they disturb only to refine it. However this be, mean talents are often rewarded in colleges, with an easy subsistence. The candidates for preferments of this kind, often regard their admission as a patent for future indolence; so that

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 89

that a life begun in studious labour, is often continued in luxurious affluence.

AMONG the universities abroad, I have ever observed their riches and their learning in a reciprocal proportion, their stupidity and pride encreasing with their opulence. Happening once in conversation with Gaubius of Leyden, to mention the college of Edinburgh, he began by complaining, that all the English students, which formerly came to his university, now went entirely there; and the fact surprized him more, as Leyden was now as well as ever furnished with masters excellent in their respective professions. He concluded by asking, if the professors of Edinburgh were rich. I reply'd, that the salary of a professor there seldom amounted to more than thirty pounds a year. Poor men, says he, I heartily wish  
they

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they were better provided for; until they become rich, we can have no expectation of English students at Leyden.

PREMIUMS also, proposed for literary excellence, when given as encouragements to boys, may be useful; but when designed as rewards to men, are certainly misapplied. We have seldom seen a performance of any great merit, in consequence of rewards proposed in this manner. Who has ever observed a writer of any eminence, a candidate in so precarious a contest? The man who knows the real value of his own genius, will no more venture it upon an uncertainty, than he who knows the true use of a guinea, will stake it with a sharper.

EVERY

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EVERY encouragement given to stupidity, when known to be such, is also a negative insult upon genius. This appears in nothing more evident, than the undistinguished success of those who solicit subscriptions. When first brought into fashion, subscriptions were conferred upon the ingenious alone, or those who were reputed such. But at present, we see them made a resource of indigence, and requested not as rewards of merit, but as a relief of distress. If tradesmen happen to want skill in conducting their own business, yet they are able to write a book; if mechanics want money, or ladies shame, they write books and solicit subscriptions. Scarce a morning passes, that proposals of this nature are not thrust into the half-opening doors of the rich, with, perhaps, a paltry petition, shewing the author's



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thor's wants, but not his merits. I would not willingly prevent that pity which is due to indigence, but while the streams of liberality are thus diffused, they must in the end become proportionably shallow.

WHAT then are the proper encouragements of genius? I answer, subsistence and respect, for these are rewards congenial to its nature. Every animal has an aliment peculiarly suited to its constitution. The heavy ox seeks nourishment from earth; the light' cameleon has been supposed to exist on air; a sparer diet even than this, will satisfy the man of true genius, for he makes a luxurious banquet upon empty applause. It is this alone, which has inspired all that ever was truly great and noble among us. It is, as Cicero finely calls it the eccho of virtue. Avarice is the  
passion

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passion of inferior natures; money the pay of the common herd. The author who draws his quill merely to take a purse, no more deserves success than he who presents a pistol.

WHEN the link between patronage and learning was entire, than all who deserved fame were in a capacity of attaining it. When the great Somers was at the helm, patronage was fashionable among our nobility. The middle ranks of mankind, who generally imitate the Great, then followed their example; and applauded from fashion, if not from feeling. I have heard an old poet of that glorious age say, that a dinner with his lordship, has procured him invitations for the whole week following; that an airing in his patron's chariot, has supplied him with a citizen's coach on every future occasion.

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sion. For who would not be proud to entertain 'a man who kept so much good company?

BUT this link now seems entirely broken. Since the days of a certain prime minister of inglorious memory, the learned have been kept pretty much at a distance. A jockey, or a laced player, supplies the place of the scholar, poet, or the man of virtue. Those conversations, once the result of wisdom, wit, and innocence, are now turned to humbler topics, little more being expected from a companion than a laced coat, a pliant bow, and an immoderate friendship for—— a well served table.

WIT, when neglected by the great, is generally despised by the vulgar. Those who are unacquainted with the world, are

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 95

apt to fancy the man of wit, as leading a very agreeable life. They conclude, perhaps, that he is attended to with silent admiration, and dictates to the rest of mankind, with all the eloquence of conscious superiority. Very different is his present situation. He is called an author, and all know that an author is a thing only to be laughed at. His person, not his jest, becomes the mirth of the company. At his approach, the most fat unthinking face, brightens into malicious meaning. Even aldermen laugh, and revenge on him, the ridicule which was lavished on their forefathers.

*Etiam victis redit in prœcordia virtus,  
Victoresque cadunt.*

It

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It is indeed a reflection somewhat mortifying to the author, who breaks his ranks, and singles out for public favour; to think that he must combat contempt, before he can arrive at glory. That he must expect to have all the fools of society united against him, before he can hope for the applause of the judicious. For this, however, he must prepare beforehand; as those who have no idea of the difficulty of his employment, will be apt to regard his inactivity as idleness, and not having a notion of the pangs of uncomplying thought in themselves, it is not to be expected they should have any desire of rewarding it in others.

VOLTAIRE has finely described the hardships a man must encounter, who writes for

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the public. I need make no apology for the length of the quotation.

‘ YOUR fate, my dear Le Fevre, is too  
‘ strongly marked to permit your retiring.  
‘ The bee must toil in making honey, the  
‘ silk-worm must spin, the philosopher  
‘ must dissect them, and you are born to  
‘ sing of their labours. You must be a  
‘ poet, and a scholar, even though your in-  
‘ clinations should resist; nature is too strong  
‘ for inclination. But hope not, my friend,  
‘ to find tranquillity in the employment you  
‘ are going to pursue. The rout of genius  
‘ is not less obstructed with disappointment,  
‘ than that of ambition.

‘ If you have the misfortune not to ex-  
‘ cel in your profession as a poet, repent-  
‘ tance must tincture all your future enjoy-

H

‘ ments.

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‘ments. If you succeed, you make ene-  
‘mies. You tread a narrow path, contempt  
‘on one side, and hatred on the other, are  
‘ready to seize you upon the slightest de-  
‘viation.

‘But, why must I be hated, you will,  
‘perhaps, reply, why must I be persecut-  
‘ed for having wrote a pleasing poem, for  
‘having produced an applauded tragedy,  
‘or for otherwise instructing, or amusing  
‘mankind, or myself.

‘My dear friend, these very successes  
‘shall render you miserable for life. Let  
‘me suppose your performance has merit,  
‘let me suppose you have surmounted the  
‘teizing employments of printing and pub-  
‘lishing, how will you be able to lull the  
‘critics, who, like Cerberus, are posted at  
‘all

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 99

‘ all the avenues of literature, and who  
‘ settle the merits of every new perfor-  
‘ mance. How, I say, will you be able to  
‘ make them open in your favour? There are  
‘ always three or four literary journals in  
‘ France, as many in Holland, each sup-  
‘ porting opposite interests. The book-  
‘ sellers, who guide these periodical compi-  
‘ lations, find their account in being severe;  
‘ the authors employed by them, have  
‘ wretchedness to add to their natural ma-  
‘ lignity. The majority may be in your fa-  
‘ vour, but you may depend on being torn  
‘ by the rest. Loaded with unmerited scur-  
‘ rility, perhaps you reply; they rejoin,  
‘ both plead at the bar of the public, and  
‘ both are condemned to ridicule.

‘ But if you write for the stage, your  
‘ case is still more worthy compassion.

H 2

‘ You



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‘ You are there to be judged by men,  
‘ whom the custom of the times has ren-  
‘ dered contemptible. Irritated by their  
‘ own inferiority, they exert all their little  
‘ tyranny upon you, revenging upon the  
‘ author, the insults they receive from the  
‘ public. From such men then you are  
‘ to expect your sentence. Suppose your  
‘ piece admitted, acted : one single ill-na-  
‘ tured jest from the pit, is sufficient to  
‘ cancel all your labours. But allowing  
‘ that it succeeds. There are an hundred  
‘ squibs flying all abroad to prove, that it  
‘ should not have succeeded. You shall  
‘ find your brightest scenes burlesqued by  
‘ the ignorant ; and the learned, who know  
‘ a little Greek, and nothing of their na-  
‘ tive language, affect to despise you.

‘ BUT,

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 101

‘ BUT, perhaps, with a panting heart,  
‘ you carry your piece before a woman of  
‘ quality. She gives the labours of your  
‘ brain to her maid, to be cut into shreds  
‘ for curling her hair; while the laced foot-  
‘ man, who carries the gaudy livery of lux-  
‘ ury, insults your appearance, who bear  
‘ the livery of indigence.

‘ BUT granting your excellence has at  
‘ last forced envy to confess, that your works  
‘ have some merit; this then is all the re-  
‘ ward you can expect while living. How-  
‘ ever, for this tribute of applause, you must  
‘ expect persecution. You will be reputed  
‘ the author of scandal which you have  
‘ never seen, of verses you despise, and of  
‘ sentiments directly contrary to your own.  
‘ In short, you must embark in some one  
‘ party, or all parties will be against you.

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‘ THERE are among us, a number of  
‘ learned societies, where a lady presides,  
‘ whose wit begins to twinkle, when the  
‘ splendour of her beauty begins to decline.  
‘ One or two men of learning compose  
‘ her ministers of state. These must be  
‘ flattered, or made enemies by being ne-  
‘ glected. Thus, though you had the  
‘ merit of all antiquity united in your per-  
‘ son, you grow old in misery and disgrace.  
‘ Every place designed for men of letters,  
‘ is filled up by men of intrigue. Some  
‘ nobleman’s private tutor, some court flat-  
‘ terer, shall bear away the prize, and  
‘ leave you to anguish and to disappoint-  
‘ ment.’

YET it were well, if none but the dunces  
of society, were combined to render the  
profession

profession of an author ridiculous or unhappy. Men of the first eminence are often found to indulge this illiberal vein of raille-ry. Two contending writers often, by the opposition of their wit, render their profes-sion contemptible in the eyes of ignorants, who should have been taught to admire. And yet, whatever the reader may think of himself, it is at least two to one, but he is a greater blockhead than the most scribbling dunce he affects to despise.

THE poet's poverty is a standing topic of contempt. His writing for bread is an un-pardonable offence. Perhaps, of all man-kind, an author, in these times, is used most hardly. We keep him poor, and yet re-vile his poverty. Like angry parents, who correct their children till they cry, and then correct them for crying, we reproach him

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for living by his wit, and yet allow him no other means to live.

His taking refuge in garrets and cellars, has, of late, been violently objected to him, and that by men, who I dare hope, are more apt to pity than insult his distress. Is poverty the writer's fault? No doubt, he knows how to prefer a bottle of champagne, to the nectar of the neighbouring alehouse, or a venison pasty to a plate of potatoes. Want of delicacy is not in him, but in us, who deny him the opportunity of making an elegant choice.

WIT certainly is the property of those who have it, nor should we be displeased if it is the only property a man sometimes has. We must not under-rate him who uses it for subsistence, and flies from the ingratitude

titude of the age, even to a bookseller for redress. If the profession of an author is to be laughed at by stupid, it is better sure to be contemptibly rich, than contemptibly poor. For all the wit that ever adorned the human mind, will at present no more shield the author's poverty from ridicule, than his high-topped gloves conceal the unavoidable omissions of his laundress.

To be more serious, new fashions, follies, and vices, make new monitors necessary in every age. An author may be considered as a merciful substitute to the legislature; he acts not by punishing crimes, but preventing them; however virtuous the present age, there may be still growing employment for ridicule, or reproof, for persuasion, or satire. If the author be, therefore, still so necessary among us, let us treat him

him with proper consideration, as a child of the public, not a rent-charge on the community. And, indeed, a *child* of the public he is in all respects; for while so well able to direct others, how incapable is he frequently found of guiding himself! His simplicity exposes him to all the insidious approaches of cunning, his sensibility to the slightest invasions of contempt. Though possessed of fortitude to stand unmoved the expected bursts of an earthquake, yet of feelings so exquisitely poignant, as to agonize under the slightest disappointment. Broken rest, tasteless meals, and causeless anxiety, shorten his life, or render it unfit for active employment; prolonged vigils, and intense application still farther contract his span, and make his time glide insensibly away. Let us not then aggravate those natural inconveniencies by neglect; we have  
 had

had sufficient instances of this kind already. Sale and More will suffice for one age at least. But they are dead, and their sorrows are over. The neglected author of the Persian eclogues, which, however inaccurate, excel any in our language, is still alive. Happy, if *insensible* of our neglect, not *raging* at our ingratitude. It is enough, that the age has already produced instances of men pressing foremost in the lists of fame, and worthy of better times, schooled by continued adversity into an hatred of their kind, flying from thought to drunkenness, yielding to the united pressure of labour, penury, and sorrow, sinking unheeded, without one friend to drop a tear on their unattended obsequies, and indebted to charity for a grave,

THE



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THE author, when unpatronized by the Great, has naturally recourse to the book-feller. There cannot be, perhaps, imagined a combination more prejudicial to taste than this. It is the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much as possible; accordingly, tedious compilations, and periodical magazines, are the result of their joint endeavours. In these circumstances, the author bids adieu to fame, writes for bread, and for that only imagination is seldom called in; he sits down to address the venal muse with the most phlegmatic apathy; and, as we are told of the Russian, courts his mistress by falling asleep in her lap. His reputation never spreads in a wider circle than that of the trade, who generally value him, not for  
the

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the fineness of his compositions, but the quantity he works off in a given time.

A LONG habit of writing for bread, thus turns the ambition of every author at last into avarice. He finds, that he has written many years, that the public are scarcely acquainted even with his name ; he despairs of applause, and turns to profit, which invites him. He finds that money procures all those advantages, that respect, and that ease, which he vainly expected from fame. Thus the man, who under the protection of the Great, might have done honour to humanity, when only patronized by the bookseller, becomes a thing little superior to the fellow who works at the press,

C H A P.

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### C H A P. XI.

#### *Of the Marks of Literary Decay in France and England.*

**T**HE faults already mentioned are such, as learning is often found to flourish under ; but there is one of a much more dangerous nature, which has begun to fix itself among us, I mean criticism, which may properly be called the natural destroyer of polite learning. We have seen that Critics, or those whose only business is to write books upon other books, are always more numerous as learning is more diffused ; and experience has shewn, that, instead of promoting its interest, which they profess to do, they generally injure it. This decay, which criticism

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cism produces, may be deplored, but can scarcely be remedied, as the man who writes against the critics, is obliged to add himself to the number. Other depravations in the republic of letters, such as affectation in some popular writer, leading others into vicious imitation ; political struggles in the state ; a depravity of morals among the people ; ill-directed encouragement, or no encouragement from the Great, these have been often found to co-operate in the decline of literature ; and it has sometimes declined, as in modern Italy, without them ; but an increase of criticism has always portended a decay. Of all misfortunes, therefore, in the commonwealth of letters, this of judging from rule, and not from feeling, is the most severe. At such a tribunal, no work of original merit can please. Sublimity, if carried to an exalted height, approaches

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proaches burlesque, and humour sinks into vulgarity ; the person who cannot feel, may ridicule both as such, and bring rules to corroborate his assertion. There is, in short, no excellence in writing, that such judges may not place among the neighbouring defects. Rules render the reader more difficult to be pleased, and abridge the author's power of pleasing.

If we turn to either country, we shall perceive evident symptoms of this natural decay beginning to appear: Upon a moderate calculation, there seems to be as many volumes of criticism published in those countries, as of all other kinds of polite erudition united. Paris sends forth not less than four literary journals every month, the *Année-littéraire*, and the *Fuille* by Freron, the *Journal Etrangere* by the Chevalier D'Arc, and

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and *Le Mercure* by Marmontel. We have two literary reviews in London, with critical news-papers and magazines without number. The compilers of these resemble the commoners of Rome; they are all for levelling property, not by encreasing their own, but by diminishing that of others. The man who has any good nature in his disposition must, however, be somewhat displeased to see distinguished reputations often the sport of ignorance. To see by one false pleasantry, the future peace of a worthy man's life disturbed, and this only because he has unsuccessfully attempted to instruct or amuse us. Though ill nature is far from being wit, yet it is generally laughed at as such. The critic enjoys the triumph, and ascribes to his parts, what is only due to his effrontery. I fire with indignation when I see persons wholly desti-

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tute

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tute of education and genius, indent to the press, and thus turn book-makers, adding to the sin of criticism the sin of ignorance also. Whose trade is a bad one, and who are bad workmen in the trade.

WHEN I consider those industrious men as indebted to the works of others for a precarious subsistence, when I see them coming down at stated intervals to rummage the bookseller's compter for materials to work upon; it raises a smile, though mixed with pity. It reminds me of an animal called by naturalists the soldier. This little creature, says the historian, is passionately fond of a shell, but not being supplied with one by nature, has recourse to the deserted shell of some other. I have seen these harmless reptiles, continues he, come down once a-year from the mountains,

rank

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 115

rank and file, cover the whole shoar and ply busily about, each in quest of a shell to please it. Nothing can be more amusing than their industry upon this occasion. One shell is too big, another too little, they enter and keep possession sometimes for a good while until one is, at last, found entirely to please. When all are thus properly equipped, they march up again to the mountains, and live in their new acquisition, till under a new necessity of changing.

THERE is, indeed scarce an error of which our present writers are guilty, that does not arise from their opposing systems, there is scarce an error that criticism cannot be brought to excuse. From this proceeds the affected security of our odes, the tuneless flow of our blank verse, the pom-



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pous epithet, laboured diction, and every other deviation from common sense, which procures the poet the applause of the month; he is praised by all, read by a few, and soon forgotten.

THERE never was an unbeaten path trodden by the poet, that the critic did not endeavour to reclaim him, by calling his attempt innovation. This might be instanced in Dante, who first followed nature, and was persecuted by the critics as long as he lived. Thus novelty, one of the greatest beauties in poetry, must be avoided, or the connoisseur be displeased. It is one of the chief privileges, however, of genius, to fly from the herd of imitators by some happy singularity; for should he stand still, his heavy pursuers will at length certainly come up, and fairly dispute the victory.

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 117

THE ingenious Mr. Hogarth used to assert, that every one, except the connoisseur, was a judge of painting. The same may be asserted of writing; the public in general set the whole piece in the proper point of view; the critic lays his eye close to all its minuteness, and condemns or approves in detail. And this may be the reason why so many writers at present, are apt to appeal from the tribunal of criticism to that of the people.

FROM a desire in the critic of grafting the spirit of ancient languages upon the English, has proceeded of late several disagreeable instances of pedantry. Among the number, I think we may reckon blank verse. Nothing but the greatest sublimity of subject can render such a measure pleasing;  
I 3 . . . however,

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however, we now see it used upon the most trivial occasions ; it has particularly found way into our didactic poetry, and is likely to bring that species of composition into disrepute, for which the English are deservedly famous.

THOSE who are acquainted with writing, know that our language runs almost naturally into blank verse. The writers of our novels, romances, and all of this class, who have no notion of stile, naturally hobble into this unharmonious measure. If rhymes, therefore, be more difficult, for that very reason, I would have our poets write in rhyme. Such a restriction upon the thought of a good poet, often lifts and encreases the vehemence of every sentiment ; for fancy, like a fountain, plays highest by diminishing the aperture. But rhymes, it will be said,

said, are a remnant of monkish stupidity, an innovation upon the poetry of the ancients. They are but indifferently acquainted with antiquity, who make the assertion. Rhymes are probably of older date than either the Greek or Latin dactyl and spondê. The Celtic, which is allowed to be the first language spoken in Europe, has ever preserved them, as we may find in the Edda of Iceland, and the Irish carrols still sung among the original inhabitants of that island. Olaus Wormius gives us some of the Teutonic poetry in this way ; and Pantoppidan, bishop of Bergen, some of the Norwegian ; in short, this jingle of sounds is almost natural to mankind, at least, it is so to our language, if we may judge from many unsuccessful attempts to throw it off.

I SHOULD not have employed so much time in opposing this erroneous innovation, if it were not apt to introduce another in its train : I mean, a disgusting solemnity of manner into our poetry; and as the prose writer has been ever found to follow the poet, it must consequently banish in both, all that agreeable trifling, which, if I may so express it, often deceives us into instruction. The finest sentiment, and the most weighty truth, may put on a pleasant face, and it is even virtuous to jest when serious advice must be disgusting. But instead of this, the most trifling performance among us now assumes all the didactic stiffness of wisdom. The most diminutive son of fame, or of famine, has his *we* and his *us*, his *firstlys* and his *secondlys* as methodical, as if bound in cow-hide, and closed with clasps  
of

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 121

of brass. Were these Monthly Reviews and Magazines frothy, pert, or absurd, they might find some pardon; but to be dull and dronish, is an encroachment on the prerogative of a folio. These things should be considered as pills to purge melancholly; they should be made up in our splenetic climate, to be taken as physic, and not so as to be used when we take it.

HOWEVER, by the power of one single monosyllable, our critics have almost got the victory over humour amongst us. Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar; then he is *low*: does he exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous, he is then very *low*. In short, they have proscribed the comic or satyrical muse from every walk but high life, which, though abounding in fools as well as the humblest

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humblest station, is by no means so fruitful in absurdity. Among well-bred fools we may despise much, but have little to laugh at; nature seems to present us with an universal blank of silk, ribbands, smiles and whispers; absurdity is the poet's game, and good breeding is the nice concealment of absurdities. The truth is, the critic generally mistakes humour for wit, which is a very different excellence. Wit raises human nature above its level; humour acts a contrary part, and equally depresses it. To expect exalted humour, is a contradiction in terms; and the critic, by demanding an impossibility from the comic poet, has, in effect, banished new comedy from the stage. But to put the same thought in a different light.

WHEN

WHEN an unexpected similitude in two objects strikes the imagination; in other words, when a thing is *wittily* expressed, all our pleasure turns into admiration of the artist, who had fancy enough to draw the picture. When a thing is *humorously* described, our burst of laughter proceeds from a very different cause; we compare the absurdity of the character represented with our own, and triumph in our conscious superiority. No natural defect can be a cause of laughter, because it is a misfortune to which ourselves are liable; a defect of this kind, changes the passion into pity or horror; we only laugh at those instances of moral absurdity, to which we are conscious we ourselves are not liable. For instance, should I describe a man as wanting his nose, there is no humour in this, as it is an accident



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dent to which human nature is subject, and may be any man's case : but should I represent this man without his nose, as extremely curious in the choice of his snuff-box, we here see him guilty of an absurdity of which we imagine it impossible for ourselves to be guilty, and therefore applaud our own good sense on the comparison. Thus, then, the pleasure we receive from wit, turns on the admiration of another; that which we feel from humour, centers in the admiration of ourselves. The poet, therefore, must place the object he would have the subject of humour in a state of inferiority; in other words, the subject of humour must be low.

THE solemnity worn by many of our modern writers is, I fear, often the mask of dulness; for certain it is, it seems to fit every author who pleases to put it on. By  
the

## OF POLITE LEARNING. 125

the complexion of many of our late publications, one might be apt to cry out with Cicero, *Civem mehercule non puto esse qui his temporibus ridere possit*. On my conscience, I believe we have all forgot to laugh in these days. Such writers probably make no distinction between what is praised, and what is pleasing; between those commendations which the reader pays his own discernment, and those which are the genuine result of his sensations. It were to be wished therefore that we no longer found pleasure with the inflated style that has for some years been looked upon as fine writing, and which every young writer is now obliged to adopt, if he chuses to be read. We should now dispense with loaded epithet, and dressing up trifles with dignity. For to use an obvious instance, it is not those who make the greatest noise with their wares in the streets, that have most to sell

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fell. Let us, instead of writing finely, try to write naturally. Not hunt after lofty expressions to deliver mean ideas; nor be forever gaping, when we only mean to deliver a whisper.

C H A P.

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### C H A P. XII.

#### *Of the STAGE.*

OUR Theatre has been generally confessed to share in this general decline, though partaking of the shew and decoration of the Italian opera, with the propriety and declamation of French performance. The stage also is more magnificent with us than any other in Europe, and the people in general fonder of theatrical entertainment. Yet still as our pleasures, as well as more important concerns, are generally managed by party; the stage has felt its influence. The managers, and all who espouse their side, are for decoration and ornament; the critic, and all who have studied French decorum, are for regularity and declamation. Thus it is almost

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most impossible to please both parties; and the poet, by attempting it, finds himself often incapable of pleasing either. If he introduces stage pomp, the critic consigns his performance to the vulgar; if he indulges in recital, and simplicity, it is accused of insipidity or dry affectation.

FROM the nature therefore of our theatre, and the genius of our country, it is extremely difficult for a dramatic poet to please his audience. But happy would he be were these the only difficulties he had to encounter; there are many other more dangerous combinations against the little wit of the age. Our poet's performance must undergo a process truly chymical before it is presented to the public. It must be tried in the manager's fire, strained

ed though a licenser, suffer from repeated corrections till it may be a mere *caput mortuum* when it arrives before the public.

THE success however of pieces upon the stage would be of little moment did it not influence the success of the same piece in the closet. Nay I think it would be more for the interests of virtue, if stage performances were read, not acted; made rather our companions in the cabinet, than on the theatre: While we are readers, every moral sentiment strikes us in all its beauty, but the love scenes are frigid, tawdry, and disgusting. When we are spectators, all the persuasives to vice receive an additional lustre. The love scene is aggravated, the obscenity heightened, the best actors figure in the most debauched characters, while the parts of morality, as they are called, are

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thrown

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thrown to some mouthing machine, who puts even virtue out of countenance, by his wretched imitation.

BUT, whatever be the incentives to vice which are found at the theatre, public pleasure are generally less guilty than solitary ones. To make our our solitary satisfactions truly innocent, the actor is useful, as by his means the poet's work makes its way from the stage to the closet, for all must allow that the reader receives more benefit by perusing a well-written play, than by seeing it acted.

But how is this rule inverted on our theatres at present? Old pieces are revived, and scarce any new ones admitted; the actor is ever in our eye, and the poet seldom permitted to appear; the public are again obliged to ruminate those hashes of absurdity,  
which

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which were disgusting to our ancestors, even in an age of ignorance; and the stage, instead of serving the people, is made subservient to the interests of avarice.

We seem to be pretty much in the situation of travellers at a Scotch inn; vile entertainment is served up, complained of and sent down; up comes worse, and that also is changed, and every change makes our wretched cheer more unfavoury. What must be done? only sit down contented, cry up all that comes before us, and admire even the absurdities of Shakespear.

LET the reader suspend his censure; I admire the beauties of this great father of our stage as much as they deserve, but could wish, for the honour of our country, and for his honour too, that many of his

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scenes



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scenes were forgotten. A man blind of one eye, should always be painted in profile. Let the spectator who assists at any of these new revived pieces, only ask himself, whether he would approve such a performance if written by a modern poet; I fear he will find that much of his applause proceeds merely from the sound of a name and an empty veneration for antiquity. In fact, the revival of those pieces of forced humour, far fetched conceits, and unnatural hyperbole, which have been ascribed to Shakespear, is rather gibbetting than raising a statue to his memory; it is rather a trick of the actor, who thinks it safest acting in exaggerated characters, and who, by out-stepping nature, chuses to exhibit the ridiculous outré of an harlequin under the sanction of that venerable name.

WHAT

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WHAT strange vamp'd comedies, farcical tragedies, or what shall I call them, speaking pantomimes, have we not of late seen. No matter what the play may be, it is the actor who draws an audience. He throws life into all; all are in spirits and merry, in at one door and out at another; the spectator, in a fool's paradise, knows not what all this means till the last act concludes in matrimony. The piece pleases our critics, because it talks old English; and it pleases the galleries, because it has ribbaldry. True taste, or even common sense, are out of the question.

BUT great art must be sometimes used before they can thus impose upon the public. To this purpose, a prologue written with some spirit generally precedes the piece,

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to inform us that it was composed by Shakespear, or old Ben, or somebody else, who took them for his model. A face of iron could not have the assurance to avow dislike ; the theatre has its partizans who understand the force of combinations, trained up to vociferation, clapping of hands, and clattering of sticks ; and though a man might have strength sufficient to overcome a lion in single combat, he may run the risk of being devoured by an army of ants.

I AM not insensible that third nights are disagreeable draw-backs upon the annual profits of the stage ; I am confident, it is much more to the manager's advantage to furbish up all the lumber, which the good sense of our ancestors, but for his care, had consigned to oblivion ; it is not with him therefore, but with the public I would expostulate ;

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postulate; they have a right to demand respect, and sure those new revived plays are no instances of the manager's deference.

I HAVE been informed, that no new play can be admitted upon our theatre unless the author chuses to wait some years, or, to use the phrase in fashion, till it comes to be played in turn. A poet thus can never expect to contract a familiarity with the stage, by which alone he can hope to succeed, nor can the most signal success relieve immediate want. Our Saxon ancestors had but one name for a wit and a witch. I will not dispute the propriety of uniting those characters then; but the man who under the present discouragements ventures to write for the stage, whatever claim he may have to the appellation of a wit, at

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least, he has no right to be called a conjuror.

FROM all that has been said upon the state of our theatre, we may easily foresee, whether it is likely to improve or decline; and whether the free-born muse can bear to submit to those restrictions, which avarice or power would impose. For the future, it is somewhat unlikely, that he whose labours are valuable, or who knows their value, will turn to the stage for either fame or subsistence, when he must at once flatter an actor, and please an audience.

C H A P.

C H A P. XIII.

*On UNIVERSITIES.*

**I**NSTEAD of losing myself in a subject of such extent, I shall only offer a few thoughts as they occur, and leave their connection to the reader,

WE seem divided, whether an education formed by travelling, or by a sedentary life, be preferable. We see more of the world by travel, but more of human nature by remaining at home. As in an infirmary, the student who only attends to the disorders of a few patients, is more likely to understand his profession, than he who indiscriminately examines them all.

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fortune, but the experiment would be too dangerous for young men.

THERE are many things relative to other countries, which can be learned to more advantage at home; their laws and policies are among the number.

THE greatest advantages which result to youth from travel, is an easy address, the shaking off national prejudices, and the finding nothing ridiculous in national peculiarities. The time spent in these acquisitions, could have been more usefully employed at home. An education in a college seems, therefore, preferable.

WE attribute to universities either too much or too little. Some assert, that they are the only proper places to advance learning;

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ing; while others deny even their utility in forming an education. Both are erroneous.

LEARNING is most advanced in populous cities, where chance often conspires with industry to promote it; where the members of this large university, if I may so call it, catch manners as they rise, study life, not logic, and have the world for correspondents.

THE greatest number of universities have ever been founded in times of the greatest ignorance.

NEW improvements in learning are seldom adopted in colleges, until admitted every where else. And this is right; we should always be cautious of teaching the  
rising



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rising generation uncertainties for truth; thus, though the professors in universities have been too frequently found to oppose the advancement of learning; yet, when once established, they are the properest persons to diffuse it.

THERE is more knowledge to be acquired from one page of the volume of mankind, if the scholar only knows how to read, than in volumes of antiquity; we grow learned, not wise, by too long a continuance at college.

THIS points out the time in which we should leave the university; perhaps, the age of twenty-one, when at our universities the first degree is generally taken, is the proper period.

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THE universities of Europe may be divided into three classes. Those upon the old scholastic establishment, where the pupils are immured, talk nothing but Latin, and support every day syllogistical disputations in school-philosophy. Would not one be apt to imagine, this was the proper education to make a man a fool! Such are the universities of Prague, Louvain, and Padua. The second is, where the pupils are under few restrictions; where all scholastic jargon is banished, where they take a degree when they think proper, and live not in the college but city. Such are Edinburgh, Leyden, Gottingen, Geneva. The third is a mixture of the two former, where the pupils are restrained, but not confined; where many, though not all, the absurdities of scholastic

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scholastic philosophy are suppressed, and where the first degree is taken after four years matriculation. Such are Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin.

As for the first class, their absurdities are too apparent to admit of a parallel. It is disputed which of the two last are most conducive to national improvement.

SKILL in the professions is acquired more by practice than study, two or three years may be sufficient for learning their rudiments. The universities of Edinburgh, &c. grant a licence for practising them, when the student thinks proper, which our universities refuse till after a residence of several years.

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THE dignity of the professions may be supported by this dilatory proceeding; but many men of learning are thus too long excluded from the lucrative advantages which superior skill has a right to expect.

THOSE universities must certainly be most frequented, who promise to give, in two years, the advantages which others will not under twelve.

THE man who has studied a profession for three years, and practised it for nine more, will certainly know more of his business, than he who has only studied it for twelve.

THE universities of Edinburgh, &c. must certainly be most proper for the study of those professions, in which men chuse

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to turn their learning to profit as soon as possible.

THE universities of Oxford, &c. are improper for this, since they keep the student from the world, which, after a certain time, is the only true school of improvement.

WHEN a degree in the professions can be taken only by men of independent fortunes, the number of candidates in learning is lessened, and consequently the advancement of learning retarded.

THIS slowness of conferring degrees is a remnant of scholastic barbarity. Paris, Louvain, and those universities which still retain their antient institutions, confer the doctor's degree slower even than we.

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THE statutes of every university should be considered as adapted to the laws of its respective government. Those should alter as these happen to fluctuate.

FOUR years spent in the arts (as they are called in colleges) is, perhaps, laying too laborious a foundation. Entering a profession without any previous acquisitions of this kind is building too bold a superstructure.

TEACHING by lecture, as at Edinburgh, may make men scholars, if they think proper; but instructing by examination, as at Oxford, will make them so, often against their inclination.

EDINBURGH only disposes the student to receive learning; Oxford often makes him actually learned.

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IN a word, were I poor, I should send my son to Leyden, or Edinburgh, though the annual expence in either, particularly in the first, is very great. Were I rich, I would send him to one of our own universities. By an education received in the first, he has the best likelihood of living; by that received in the latter, he has the best chance of becoming great.

WE have of late heard much of the necessity of studying oratory. Vespasian was the first who paid professors of rhetoric, for publicly instructing youth at Rome. However, those pedants, never made an orator.

THE best orations that ever were spoken, were pronounced in the parliaments  
of

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of King Charles the First. These men  
never studied the rules of oratory.

**MATHEMATICS** are, perhaps, too much  
studied at our universities. This seems  
a science, to which the meanest intellects  
are equal. I forget who it is that says,  
“All men might understand mathematics,  
“if they would.”

**THE** most methodical manner of lec-  
turing, whether on morals or nature, is  
first rationally to explain, and then pro-  
duce the experiment. The most instruc-  
tive method is, to shew the experiment  
first; curiosity is then excited, and atten-  
tion awakened to every subsequent de-  
duction. From hence it is evident, that,  
in a well-formed education, a course of  
history should ever precede a course of  
ethics.



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THE sons of our nobility are permitted to enjoy greater liberties in our universities, than those of private men. I should blush to ask the men of learning and virtue, who preside in our seminaries, the reason of such a prejudicial distinction. Our youth should there be inspired with a love of philosophy: and the first maxim among philosophers is, that merit only makes distinction.

WHENCE has proceeded the vain magnificence of expensive architecture in our colleges? Is it, that men study to more advantage in a palace than in a cell? One single performance of taste, or genius, confers more real honours on its parent university, than all the labours of the chissel.

SURE,

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SURE pride itself has dictated to the fellows of our colleges the absurd passion of being attended at meals, and on other public occasions, by those poor men, who, willing to be scholars, come in upon some charitable foundation. It implies a contradiction, for men to be at once learning the *liberal* arts, and at the same time treated as *slaves*; at once studying freedom, and practising servitude.

## C H A P. XIV.

*The* CONCLUSION.

**E**VERY subject acquires an adventitious importance to him who considers it with application. He finds it more closely connected with human happiness, than the rest of mankind are apt to allow; he sees consequences resulting from it, which do not strike others with equal conviction; and, still pursuing speculation beyond the bounds of reason, too frequently becomes ridiculously earnest in trifles, or absurdity.

It will, perhaps, be incurring this imputation, to deduce an universal degeneracy of manners, from so slight an origin

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as the depravation of taste ; to assert, that, as a nation grows dull, it sinks into debauchery. Yet such, probably, may be the consequence of literary decay ; or, not to stretch the thought beyond what it will bear, vice and stupidity are always mutually productive of each other.

LIFE, at the greatest and best, has been compared to a froward child, that must be humoured, and played with, till it falls asleep, and then all the care is over. Our few years are laboured away in varying its pleasures ; new amusements are pursued with studious attention ; the most childish vanities are dignified with titles of importance ; and the proudest boast of the most aspiring philosopher is no more, than that he provides his little play-fellows the greatest pastime with the greatest innocence.

Thus

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Thus the mind, ever wandering after amusement, when abridged of happiness on one part, endeavours to find it on another; when intellectual pleasures are disagreeable, those of sense will take the lead. The man, who, in this age, is enamoured of the tranquil joys of study and retirement, may, in the next, should learning be fashionable no longer, feel an ambition of being foremost at an horse-course; or, if such could be the absurdity of the times, of being himself a jockey. Reason and appetite are therefore masters of our revels in turn; and, as we incline to the one, or pursue the other, we rival angels, or imitate the brutes. In the pursuit of intellectual pleasure lies every virtue; of sensual, every vice.

It is this difference of pursuit which marks the morals and characters of mankind;

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kind ; which lays the line between the enlightened philosopher and the half-taught citizen ; between the civil citizen and the illiterate peasant ; between the law-obeying peasant, and the wandering savage of Africa, an animal less mischievous indeed than the tiger, because endued with fewer powers of doing mischief. The man, the nation, must therefore be good, whose chiefest luxuries consist in the refinement of reason : and reason can never be universally cultivated, unless guided by Taste, which may be considered as the link between science and common-sense, the medium through which learning should ever be seen by society.

TASTE will, therefore, often be a proper standard, when others fail, to judge of a nation's improvement, or degeneracy,  
in

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in morals. We have often no permanent characteristics by which to compare the virtues or the vices of our ancestors with our own. A generation may rise and pass away, without leaving any traces of what it really was ; and all complaints of our deterioration may be only topics of declamation, or the cavillings of disappointment : but in Taste we have standing evidence ; we can, with precision, compare the literary performances of our fathers with our own, and, from their excellence or defects, determine the moral, as well as the literary, merits of either.

If, then, there ever comes a time, when Taste is so far depraved among us, that critics shall load every work of genius with unnecessary comment, and quarter their empty performances with the substantial

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stantial merit of an author, both for subsistence and applause; if there comes a time, when censure shall speak in storms, but praise be whispered in the breeze, while real excellence often finds shipwreck in either; if there be a time, when the Muse shall seldom be heard, except in plaintive elegy, as if she wept her own decline, while lazy compilations supply the place of original thinking; should there ever be such a time, may succeeding critics, both for the honour of our morals, as well as our learning, say, that such a period bears no resemblance to the present age!

*F I N I S,*



